

# Japuji Sahib: Benediction of Guru Nanak

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We daily recite the Japuji - some of us from early childhood when our parents drilled into our minds that it must be learnt by heart. I must confess I am one of those who had never delved into its profound, panoramic excellence in depicting the Lord's glory in matchless splendour detailed in cryptic but Divine words. Perhaps I knew the meaning of the verses, however inadequately, but the total majesty of what God is like, how His play of the world functions, how He makes it possible for the yearning souls to reach Him, how limitless He is in everything and how no claim of knowledge about His totality is perfect or absolute had never entered my heart.

I am grateful to the organisers of Gurmat Camp - The Guru Gobind Singh Study Circle, Andhra Pradesh - who, under some apprehension that I could interpret Japji Sahib for children, asked me to talk on the subject. Totally inept and conscious of my incapacity, I have tried to brush up my understanding. Whether I am able or not to satisfy the organisers or the children, I have benefited a great deal in writing this paper as an opportunity to sing the glories of the Lord and to pay my respects to Guru Nanak for his glorious gift to humanity.

Taking a panoramic look at the majesty of Guru Nanak's premier Divine message marking the beginning of Guru Granth Sahib, I am astounded that our Guru's guidance is so complete in terms of living our lives in peace and happiness that the adherent can never go wrong. And the guidance is so perfect a step-by-step analysis that a devotee who listens to this message and lives by it obediently will have nothing but bliss in his entire life. I take the sloka first. For every soul in the world, Guru makes it a playground under the guidance of Lord Himself with Air as the Guru, Water as the Father and Earth as Mother being reared by the nurses, Day and Night. In other words, Guru is guiding the soul, Earth as mother has given the body and water is the source of life from the Father. During the day, Man functions in various capacities but the Night nurse puts him to sleep. All his deeds are being watched by the director of the play and being scrutinised. According to the scrutiny in the Lord's court of his deeds, he will find himself near God or far away from God, although the everlasting God will always be in His usual presence. And those who have laboured hard in Naam to reach him or merge in Him will find their faces bright because of having acquitted themselves well. Indeed they will liberate many others connected with them.

Guru Nanak opens his secrets with the expertise of a great performer presenting his masterpiece. The Guru brings out in Mool mantra the full splendour of the Lord, His majesty and His beginning-less ever lasting existence, His fearless and hatred-free truth in the past, in the present and in the future. And now he excites the soul to look for Him, enjoy Him,

receive His love, through Guru's grace.

I would like to take together pauris 1 to 7 in defining the scope of Guru's thrust for understanding such a splendid Lord. He rules out external purities, silences, fastings or worldly intellect but emphasises that the wall of falsehood can be broken only by living in God's will. Indeed the will cannot be understood - although everything is in His command and will - but those who do understand His will lose their haumein, i.e. ego. Everyone tries to describe God with his limited personal concern through His gifts or His strength or His presence, etc. but not one can grasp His full majesty. Guru Nanak suggests a way. To receive His love and see His darbar, get up at amritvela, sing His praises and meditate on His glories. You will receive His grace for salvation; but that is not the point. Real thing is to become sachiar truthful or know the sachiar. God is Truth and the Truth-knower, i.e. sach & sachiar. Guru Nanak encourages us to become one with Him. And he goes on: Since the Lord is self-created and is dependent on no one, Guru's word can open the door to Him through the grace of ceaseless remembrance which Guru Nanak pleads for. He says your intellect will be full of diamonds and pearls if you listen to Guru's one command, i.e. never to forget the Lord of all. Not only are externals valueless. The worldly grandeur, the possessions, the acclaim of all the worlds, millions of years of age - all, practically all are of no use, if grace of the Lord is not there. If this is not there, no one will even recognise you and you will be considered a little worm and even criminals will

accuse you of crime.

Having set out guidelines to know the Lord, Guru Nanak details the benefits of listening to His Naam. Four paudis, from 8 to 11, apart from stressing freedom from pain and sin and ensuring uninterrupted bliss for the bhaktas, go to bring out the heights of knowledge and understanding of the Divine and the levels to which the listener can reach. The Guru then stresses that this is not enough. He goes on the Paudis 12 to 15 in emphasising living in obedience to what one listens to. Naam, he says, is untainted and is so, so uplifting that only the rare ones get to imbibe it. But those who do become so high that others cannot fathom their greatness. They take themselves high of course but also become the centres of improvements for others.

They can become panchas (the select ones) both in the world and in God's court, says Guru Nanak in paudi 16, and get to understand the real base of world's existence. That is dharma and not the imagined bull. And dharma, the son of Compassion lives only if contentment reigns. The Panchas realise that the grandeur of the Lord cannot be understood totally and the Guru says we are sacrifice unto Him because "who can describe Him completely?" Let us accept His will and know whatever He does must be the best.

Paudis 17 to 19 detail the different aspects of the Play of the Lord in the world. Countless of bhaktas and their

systems of bhakti apart, there are millions of wicked men and their wicked deeds. And in every case the order of the Lord is perfect. He alone is free from anyone's order. Everybody else is functioning in terms of His writings (destiny). To say "millions" too is a misnomer for God know how many more there are. The best thing is to sacrifice oneself unto Him and accept His will sweetly believing that whatever He does, must be wonderful.

In this play where the saints, the wicked and other abound, Guru Nanak then suggests in paudis 20 to 23, that naam alone is the thing. Naam apart from washing off previous sins and bad thoughts in the intellect, ensures that 'good' or 'bad' are not the proper labels. You attract the result according to your deeds and you reap what you have sown. The emphasis is on gathering virtues for bhakti because without qualities there can be no bhakti and external pilgrimages, etc. are of no use. Living in Naam enables you to know about what even Scriptures may not know. Guru Nanak says countless worlds and patals exist and even puranas and koran do not know. Similarly the worldly kings, masters of oceans and hills cannot equal the strength of the ant which is drenched in naam. This powerful message then leads Guru Nanak to define the limitlessness of God's grandeur, God's graciousness and God's unassessable qualities. Only fools will say they know all. Rishis, Munis, Sidhas and others have all tried and passed away. And God remains be-ant, be-ant and be-ant (Pudis 24 to 26).

The dramatic pen-picture of the Lord sitting at the threshold of his home watching and surveying His creation, all of which is singing His praises, and He, the Truth and the Ever-lasting Truth, doing whatever He wants without anyone ordering Him about is superb in Paudi 27. Paudis 28 to 31 bring out the hollowness of external rites of the Jogi and the Guru stresses contentment, chastity, laaj, faith, and meditation in stead as also the consideration of all human beings as of one panth or race, as their aai panth. Let him feed himself on atam-gyan from the store-house of compassion and remain away from ridhi-sidhi. Let him recognise the Lord as the nath in whom all the people are represented and it is the Lord who dispenses union or separation on the basis of karmas. Again it is the Lord who is in control, the three disciples have come out of Maya's connection with Him. The Lord makes them Shiva, Brahma and Vishnu - work as He wants and the wonder is that He sees them but they realise not. Also, in all the worlds, it is the Lord who is present and watches and surveys all. The Yogi's concepts are false. And the Guru stresses : Let us make obeisances to the one Lord who has no beginning and is untainted and is ever imperishable and indeed remains unchangeable.

Paudis 32 and 33 make a wonderful appeal. If nothing else avails, Guru Nanak wants us all, ceaselessly and repeatedly, to go on reciting Lord's Naam so that falsehood which may try to imitate would automatically fall away and those who are sincere will merge in the Lord, because nothing is attained with one's own force. Speaking, remaining silent,

attaining knowledge or becoming gyani, all - literally all - is under His command and He commands and watches; therefore no one is high or low (in terms of Brahmanic principles)

Puadis 34 to 37 which are nearly the concluding portion of Japji Sahib, beautifully bring out the levels in terms of spirituality which can form the syllabus of a real aspirant on the basis of what he has understood and learnt so far. Let him become a disciple-student, a serious one to watch his karmas in the dharmasaal which is the world. But the dharmkhand (the level of dharma) presupposes that all his karmas will be scrutinised and his truth or untruth (kach-pakai) will be judged there. So he becomes very strict in watching himself.

Having thus made serious efforts to guard his actions, he enters gyan-khand, a concept in which, in addition to his external eyes, he begins to have internal vision of the whole existence and creations of the Lord in which he finds countless Vishnus and Krishnas, Suns, Moons, Earths, etc. Thus his inner eye is opened. That is gyan-khand. Then he realises in saram-khand in shame and agony that he is nothing. He must work hard and steadfastly walk on the path of the Lord and get rid of other infirmities to become the most beautiful one to be loved by the Lord in his grace. Then comes karam khand, where Lord's grace abounds. Only those people reach there, who have successfully passed through the earlier levels and now have become so powerful that they have God entrenched into themselves and they cannot be cheated, nor can they die.

Thereafter they come face to face with the Lord who is in sachkhand. And He surveys all and showers His grace. Limitless, limitless and indescribable are the words to define this sachkhand.

And, finally, in Paudi 38, Guru Nanak lays down a wonderful but very difficult concept of the human being being struck as a coin in shabad-taksal (minting Truth) through various tortuous experiences like the gold coin, but the Guru refers to the fireplace of self-control, patience as gold-smith and the virtues of intellect being guided by Scriptural Truth, holy fear and devoted love along with the Amrit-Nam. when the coin - the human being - is ready in the shabad-oriented taksal with the grace of the Lord, God always shows him His graciousness and keeps the devotee in bliss.

It is a pity that we Sikhs - the so called Sikhs because we are deviating from our Guru's commands to such an extent that I hang my head in shame for my inadequacies - have not derived the benefits that accrue to us by the simplest method of Guru Nanak's guidance. The message of Japji Sahib is thus a ceaseless remembrance of the Lord in ceaseless presence of the Lord with ceaseless prayer for light, guidance and grace